

TRIP TO MOON ONLY THRILL LEFT FOR AIR COP

Capt. Fitzgerald, Daredevil Commander of New York's Aerial Police, Lays Claim to Having Followed Eighteen Vocations Without a Tame One Among Them—His Personality as Filled With Contradictions as His Life Is With Adventure

CAPT. CHARLES N. FITZGERALD, commander in the New York Air Police, daredevil and aerial stuntster, who can lay claim to having followed eighteen vocations successfully, can also lay claim to having followed eighteen contradictions in his personality. Some of them might be listed thus:

Though he has done practically every conceivable stunt in the air without a quiver and is planning new ones, the New York subway bothers him.

In his varied career he has been a saloon keeper twice, but he doesn't touch a drop of liquor.

A daredevil by profession, his avowed intention in his feats is to promote the safety of others and to advance science, wherefore he has volunteered to jump to the moon in the rocket of Prof. Robert H. Goddard of Clark University.

He can endure broken bones, but he dreads pin pricks.

With the physical development of a Roman gladiator, his favorite article of diet is peanut butter.

Though he has been a prizefighter and fought a number of bouts, he has escaped the cauliflower ear and has the courteous manner of a Spanish don.

After using his hands in many kinds of hard work, they are still supple and unroughened, and he writes with the fine penmanship of a calling card scribe.

In spite of devoting so much of his life to physical attainments, an odd spiritual side peeps out.

Ascribing his ability to perform his stunts mainly to great will power, he has a jaw that appears to be only of the ordinary type, not the square jawed variety commonly associated with strength of purpose.

A native of Texas, where drawing is a specialty, he speaks in rapid fire bursts of language.

Not Worry but Laughter Causes the Wrinkles in His Face

All these conflicting qualities naturally don't pop out at the observer when first he visits Capt. Fitzgerald in his temporary abiding place on West Fifty-sixth street—temporary, for he probably will be flitting soon, looking for new worlds to conquer, if not here, at any rate on the moon. The first impression one gets of him is suggestive of Douglas Fairbanks. Like the movie star, he is dark and of medium height, though somewhat more stockily built. He has the same breezy air, the same power of quick observation and retentive memory, the same lively conversational powers, and the same dash in doing anything. Similarly, he believes in the gospel of laughter.

"See these wrinkles?" he says, pointing to the deep corrugations around his eyes. "These don't come from grousches. I scarcely ever have worries—in fact, I refuse to let anything worry me. A laugh will get you further than a sour face any time. I'm 35 years old, and I feel younger than ever."

And the squad of young men who are being broken into the daredevil game by him all swear that Capt. Fitzgerald is more of a boy than any of them. He goes after his thrills for amusement as well as to earn a livelihood.

His favorite stunts are looping the loop while standing on the top wing of an airplane and transferring a man from the top of another flying "bus" to his own airplane by hanging by the knees from a swinging ladder, grabbing the other man's hands, hoisting him up to the ladder and then following up after him while nervous prostration becomes epidemic among the spectators. He has records to show that he first performed the feat of looping the loop while standing on an airplane without being fastened to the wing, on August 14, 1919, though he explains there was an earlier tryout of the same trick—an unofficial stunt, because no one wanted to assume responsibility in case it made him a candidate for the hereafter.

He worked out this stunt by a study of the laws of gravitation and tells how the idea came to him a couple of years ago at 3 o'clock in the morning. His means of demonstrating its feasibility to himself were very simple.

Experiments With a Tin Can Develop His New Stunt Idea

"I woke up with this bee in my bonnet," he said, "and got my landlady to give me a can—you know, the kind they rush the growler with. Then I put a teacupful of water in it, clapped on the lid and put on top a butter bean. I tied a string twenty-five inches long on the lid and then started the can swinging gently. Presently I had it whirling around over my head and kept it circling—and, do you know, that bean never slid off that slippery tin cover."

"Then I knew I could stick on any airplane. But I had a hard job convincing any one else I could. Finally I induced a young man to let me use his plane with this arrangement: We were to start from a field out on Long Island. I was to go there by automobile, get out several blocks away and walk to the plane. Without saying a word to him as he sat in the cockpit I was to climb up on the wing and he was to start up. All these precautions were taken so that if I fell off no one could be burdened with the responsibility, and I'd be as unidentified as a fallen meteor."

Fitzgerald succeeded in this first attempt, of course, and did it again at the police field games last year, winning a letter of commendation from Inspector Dwyer instead of being arrested for disorderly conduct in the air. This is how he describes the stunt, performed on a small special platform atop the upper wing:

"I climb to the wing after we've gone up and stand erect, unattached to the plane in any way. My pilot, Lieut. Dixie Davis, noses the plane over into a dive. We start down at a speed of from seventy to eighty miles an hour. Then, just as the wind is about to sweep me off the wing, I give the signal to my pilot to 'zoom.' We swing upward in the beginning of the loop, and that's what keeps me on my perch. We swing upward and around so fast I hardly have time to think much less fall off."

"When we first start on the nose dive the weight is all on my right leg, bracing me in the rear, and in this leg I feel the whole plane vibrating. Then as we zoom upward the weight and the quivering is transferred to the left leg, and I suddenly begin shaking all over, as though I had convulsions. It's

all I can do to stand erect. As we dip downward again to complete the loop, the palpitations naturally go into my hind leg again."

The great danger is that the plane as it soars aloft may lose flying speed—about forty miles an hour—and because of engine trouble hang in the air, meaning that unless it gathers headway to complete the loop a tall spin will be the result, with flowers for all. Once, when going up with Miss Laura Bromwell as the pilot, Fitzgerald, hanging on the landing gear as on a trapeze, noticed that at the very peak of the loop Miss Bromwell's engine "clucked on her." It

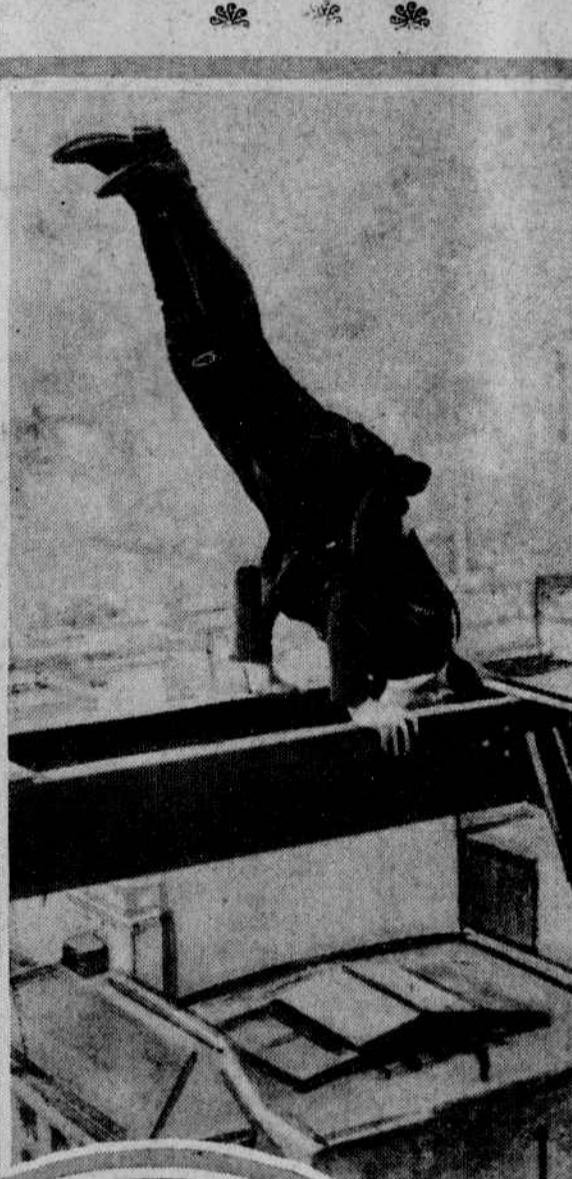
there was no reason why I couldn't transfer a passenger from one plane to another—principally to show how passengers could be shifted from plane to plane in case the need ever arose in commercial flying. I threw in the trick of hanging by my knees just to make it harder and to set the crowd on edge.

As a matter of fact, strolling on top of girders while a skyscraper is being erected bores him. He went for an airing a few days ago on the topmost iron beams of the structure for Loew's new State Theatre building which is beginning to tower over

illness that he can remember, and any one who feels his biceps will discover lumps like stone. He has powerfully developed shoulder blades and leg muscles of iron. But despite his rounded sinews and a weight of about 190 pounds the Captain is unusually supple.

This splendid physical development has come as the result of a varied and strenuous career calculated to make a man either an upstanding specimen of liveliness or else a fit subject for the undertaker. After having rushed upon the world outside Cleburne, Texas, near the Nolands River, he fell right in line with his destiny at the age of five by

Capt. Charles N. Fitzgerald, commander of the New York Air Police, performing on the girders of a new skyscraper structure being built in this city. He says that such stunts are all right to thrill spectators, but they have become tame to him. He prefers standing on the wing of an airplane while looping the loop. Picture in circle shows him with his stunt pupil, Al Billings.



In the twenty-six years since he started out as a lad to push his way through the world Capt. Charles N. Fitzgerald cites the following eighteen occupations which he has followed:

Texas Ranger
Cowpuncher
Druggist
High diver
Aviation stuntster
Steamboat mate
Railroad fireman
Saloonkeeper
Cigar store clerk
Produce dealer
Automobile racer
Motorcycle racer
Hotel clerk
Vaudeville strong man
Automobile salesman
Movie actor
Parachute jumper
Pugilist

stopped dead, and as the plane lost headway for a moment it looked as though they would stop the same way.

But though Fitzgerald was hanging upside down and had been whirled around in a way to make the ordinary man dizzy, his brains weren't so scrambled that he couldn't think to swing his weight forward on the landing gear in the direction of the nose of the plane. This shift gave just the added impetus needed to bring the nose down and send them skyrocketing to earth head first, the safest way.

Another narrow escape occurred after he had made the standing loop successfully and the "ship" was swooping to the ground. Fitzgerald stepped backward and one foot slipped suddenly down through the scalloped "bite" in the upper wing just over his own cockpit. He tumbled down—into his own cockpit, luckily for him. But in falling his clothes caught in the dual controls, and his pilot was unable to work them in the cockpit behind as they rushed pell-mell toward the earth. A crash seemed imminent, but Fitzgerald managed to disentangle himself 300 feet above ground, and they flattened out safely. The crowd cheered enthusiastically, thinking the tumble was part of the stunt.

For his other trick, which he calls "a rescue in the air," he is already breaking in a girl flyer. He is practicing this in a Long Island flying field, where he stages his own private hairbreadth escapes when not tutoring the members of the air police force at their field. The first time he accomplished this exploit he had to lift Lieut. Al Billings another daredevil, who weighs 165 pounds, and the second time he raised a willing victim weighing 160 pounds, so it can be seen this is no parlor trick.

"I got the idea for this," Capt. Fitzgerald says, "from Lieut. Locklear's stunt in swinging up from one plane to another by a rope ladder. I thought that if he could do that

Broadway at Forty-fifth street, and he confesses that he is tiring of this and like experiences.

"I stood on one foot on the edge of a parapet," he says, "kissed my hand to the crowd below, waved by handkerchief to them, and raised my free foot as though I was about to scratch my ear with it. All that was just to amuse the onlookers who were gaping and goggling below, for it's the crowd that amuses me, not the performance. I think, 'Why, you poor crocodiles, this is nothing—and yet you're gasping!'"

"In the same way I crawled out on a projecting girder, threw up my hands and tumbled over backward as though about to fall to the street—but I caught myself with my knees. The thrill was for the crowd, not for me—for I was grinning, as you can see by the pictures they took. I never feel the least hesitation, and I'm not flustered, no matter how high up I am. I just do the stunt as though I was on the ground."

To keep this surety and physical and mental poise, Capt. Fitzgerald takes good care of himself. He has never touched a drop of liquor, he says, and doesn't chew, nor drink tea, coffee, or milk. He observes care with his dietary, and besides eating a jar of peanut butter a day also makes it a point to consume an apple. But he is no vegetarian, being "a great bacon and eggs boy." He eats pork, veal and steaks, but little ham and avoids eating too much meat.

He goes to bed regularly at 10:30 P. M., awaking at 8 A. M. He is always in good physical condition, never having had a day's

being in a schoolhouse which a cyclone picked up and then set down in a hurry after turning it around. Having come out alive and had his thirst for adventure whetted by this, he and a brother a couple of years older soon afterward drove seventeen head of cattle to new grazing lands on the Knox Prairie, of the Brazos River in Texas.

From an early age he was continually plotting to pursue a life of thrills, and getting wholeheartedly lapped for it by his family. At the age of nine his first spectacular essay as an embryonic daredevil led him to leave home. It was all because no one but his father was supposed to be able to ride a bronco whose hasty and irresponsible disposition entitled him to the name of "Cyclone." This horse was hitched to a post one day, waiting for Pa Fitzgerald to come out and kick in his ribs, when young Fitzgerald decided to emulate Alexander the Great and tame the bronco out of hand.

Pa heard the rumpus and came out of the house as the living tornado passed for the sixth time, and the boy, catching a glimpse of his face, promptly dived off the horse and into a big watering trough. He fled for shelter in a very personal manner and poured leather into him from a bull whip. After that young Fitzgerald decided that his home life would be improved by leaving it.

After punching cows on the Watkins ranch and drifting through Mexico and Ari-

zona he met a Texas Ranger who could speak remarkably pure and fluent English, which reminded Fitzgerald it was high time he accumulated an education. So he wandered into Tempe to attend the Tempe Normal School of Arizona with no capital but 15 cents and a thick coat of tan.

"Before nightfall," he said, "I'd spent ten cents of that for gum-drops, just like a kid."

But he worked his way through the school by such jobs as tending buggies in a livery stable for 50 cents a day—a position which he lost when the son of the livery stable keeper found Fitzgerald could lick him. After being a star on the school's baseball and football teams he graduated at the age of 16—"thank Heaven," he said feelingly.

He joined the Texas Rangers, became a marksman, dipped into the prize fighting game, and then his roving spirit took him to Los Angeles for no other reason than to learn pharmacy. He had a drug store in San Francisco at the time of the earthquake and received a cut on the head as a souvenir. As life seemed likely to get dull again after this he stirred up matters by taking a dive of 200 feet off a bridge in Portland, Ore. Hearing that Alaska kept one from getting soft he shipped on the steamer Alliance as first mate, a post he gained not so much because of the slight boating experience he had on the Willamette River, but because he could handle men in situations where kid gloves would be out of fashion.

Fed Up With Alaska, He Joins

Royal Northwest Mounted Police

Having been frozen in for seven weeks and gone polar bear hunting he felt he had exhausted Alaska's possibilities for thrills and went through Canada, working in conjunction with the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. Then he ran into Boise City, Idaho, became a railroad fireman, started to study engineering and decided to snap back into cowpunching. Rambles through Wyoming and Montana brought him to Denver, where he varied the monotony of being in the saloon business—with a fling at the cigar business—by a whirl at prize fighting. At the time of the wrestling match between Frank Gotch and Doc Roller Fitzgerald boxed a semi-final bout with Dick McCall, an Australian favorite, knocked him out and later had to knock him out again to convince him.

Trying to keep himself chained to the unromantic produce business in Salt Lake City drove him in 1908 to diving under automobiles to fix them. He had been tinkering with gasoline buggies ever since 1899, and claims to be one of the pioneers in learning how to manhandle them. After working at the mechanical end of the business he had his own cars by 1909 and entered the racing game, pitting his cylinders and his smoke screen on the Central Western tracks against

such racers as Ralph de Palma. He also did motorcycle racing.

When the excitement from this seemed likely to die down, Fitzgerald slid on a wire from a mountain top outside Hot Springs, Ark., hanging by his teeth to a strap until he reached the ground 1,160 feet away. He varied the hotel business in California by winning with a partner a five mile ocean relay swim, starting from Long Wharf, capturing a gold cup; the Captain feels as much at home in the water as in the air. Next he went through a cyclone in Indian Territory in which he lost two cousins, but came through unscathed because once more he rode out the storm in a schoolhouse that was twisted askew.

Fitzgerald drifted East now—altogether he says he has crossed the Rockies twenty-three times by horse, automobile, motorcycle, airplane and train. While working here as an automobile salesman in 1912 he pulled two kids out of the Hudson River at 145th street. In spite of family opposition he tried another wallop at the fighting game—and "in those days," he says, "New York was a tough place for a newcomer to fight in, with the crowd taking a hand in the bouts occasionally with pop bottles—though that's changed now."

After he knocked down an opponent at a sporting club twice and had him sitting on the floor, the spectators, he says, decided he wasn't to win. "A pop bottle flew up and kissed me on the chin, and while my opponent was taking the count I took it, too, and went off into slumberland."

Then his manager was killed by a train in Long Island City and Fitzgerald decided for this and other reasons to quit the ring for good.

He Dives Off Rumson Road Bridge, Dropping 86 Feet Into Shallow Water

Instead he took up such reposeful occupations as diving off the Rumson road bridge in New Jersey, dropping 86 feet into 3½ feet of water. Following various athletic and water stunts in Florida he opened his own automobile sales agency in Rochester in 1914 and toured the country in a trick automobile of his own design which looked like a German submarine—a design which was not then so unpopular as it became later.

In the spring of 1915 he went in for aviation, and not only devised new ideas for airplanes but was successful in flying until September 6, 1917, when he fell, receiving severe injuries which kept him in the hospital for nearly a year. While he was recuperating he participated in a Red Cross benefit with other daredevils by diving from a high building into a shallow tank of water, throwing aside his crutches, he says, to make the leap.

There followed a term in the movies. He did various hair-raising deeds before the camera, such as driving a touring car off a bridge and into the Gila River, 96 feet below, throwing out three dummies in descent and just managing to swim ashore through the turbulent current, as limp as a dummy himself. He did character acting also in Western studios, found his emotions becoming stagnant and took to parachute jumping in Oregon.

He formed a team called Godia, Godia and Fitzgerald, and the elder Godia presently passed on by biting through the teeth-strap by which he was suspended in a parachute descent. That left the team as Godia and Fitzgerald. In a short while the second Godia met his fate by landing on live electric wires, and that left only Fitzgerald. He decided to look for trouble elsewhere. That brought him into aviation stunts and down to date.

The Captain—who delves into a big scrapbook of newspaper clippings every time he wants to verify a statement—says he can make himself understood in five languages—one of which includes a Chinese lingo he picked up on a trip around the world which he skimmed through Europe, China and Japan.

But in a short time he expects to see his mother for the first time in nineteen years. Particularly because he wants presently to hop off to the moon in that skyrocket. This last—perhaps the greatest adventure of his full life—he aspires to make for the advancement it will bring to science, just as he avers his aerial capers are for the advancement of aviation. After a career as diversified and dashing as Cyrano de Bergerac, he is to make, as Cyrano said he did, a flight to the moon—if Prof. Goddard will let him.